

Land's End to John O'Groats 7 – 15 September 2019

The 'End to End' has been an iconic cycling challenge since before the Tour de France was even a glint in Henri Desgrange's eye. It always has and always will be a true test of stamina and will.

The reason it has stood the test of time as a challenge? The simplicity of going from South to North and the breath-taking variety of scenery it passes through. Why South to North? Normally the prevailing winds are South Westerly's – to help you on your way. This year we had a North Wind...not so easy!

However, I did it 😊



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The Route

Stage 1

The ride begins with some of the toughest climbs of the entire route but these come with rewarding views of the impressive coastline, St. Michael's Mount and Cornwall's iconic china clay pits. We crossed the edge of Bodmin Moor and skirted around Dartmoor, hitting the short, steep climbs and descents that Devon and Cornwall are so famous for.

KEY STATS Distance: 105.6 miles Ascent: 8,232ft Challenge Rating: 4/5	HIGHLIGHTS OF THE DAY St Michael's mount Stunning moorland Steep climbs and fast descents China clay pits
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Stage 2

Skirting the edge of Dartmoor, crossing the Quantock Hills and arriving at the long climb of Cheddar Gorge; this was another 'grippy' day on the bike. The arrival in the stunning city of Bath with a bed for the night in the University Halls was a bonus. Thank goodness, the support team help carry our bags to your room! (My bag was bigger than me!)

The town is built on an extinct volcano, meaning there was a little sting in the tail with the final ascent up to the basecamp.

KEY STATS Distance: 110.4 miles Ascent: 6,852ft Challenge Rating: 4/5	HIGHLIGHTS OF THE DAY Views from the Quantock Hills Cheddar Gorge Ancient city of Bath
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Stage 3

Heading out of Bath, we skirted the South-Western flank of the Cotswolds before crossing the sweeping expanse of the Bristol Channel on the Severn Bridge – in the pouring rain. There was a pit stop at Chepstow Castle before one of the most beautiful sections of the ride along the River Wye.

Sadly the weather was not kind to us today. It rained almost all day.

KEY STATS

Distance: 100.9 miles
Ascent: 5,948ft
Challenge Rating: 3/5

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE DAY

Crossing the Severn Bridge
Chepstow Castle
Hidden roads along the glorious Wye Valley

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Stage 4

Setting off with the sun rising over the hills (actually it was almost dark), we crossed the edge of the Stiperstones hill before hitting the Shropshire and Cheshire plains around lunchtime. This is where the ride flattens out significantly. I left the group today wanting to go faster. It worked for the day but later I realised the support of a group was a necessary thing to maintain mental stability! The landscape becomes more suburban as the route passes between Manchester and Liverpool on the approach to Haydock Park and your next camp for the night.

KEY STATS Distance: 106.9 miles Ascent: 3,133ft Challenge Rating: 2/5	HIGHLIGHTS OF THE DAY Views of the iconic Stiperstones Pedal through the industrial heartland of England Manchester ship canal
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Stage 5

Rush hour in Wigan and Preston was a challenge – plenty of unhappy drivers, but the scenery improved, allowing views towards the Pennines to your right and out to the Blackpool Tower over the Fylde Coast to the left. We passed the end of Bradley Wiggins' road (apparently!) and then continued North with the mighty Lake District rising around us. After a quick pit stop and a deep breath, we set off on the steady climb of Shap Fell. Weather did have a big impact on our enjoyment of this climb as the sunshine would make the views from the top unforgettable whilst howling wind and rain will make it a stern test for any seasoned rider. Hmmm.

KEY STATS Distance: 116.4 miles Ascent: 5,558ft Challenge Rating: 3/5	HIGHLIGHTS OF THE DAY The mighty Shap Fell Crowds of primary school children cheered us along the way
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Dramatic views of the Lake District



Stage 6

Heading North from Carlisle we reached the border of Scotland with some of the most dramatic scenery lying ahead of us. The ride to Hopetoun Estate offered fantastic views of the Lowther Hills, the River Clyde and the iconic Forth Railway Bridge.

KEY STATS

Distance: 114.4 miles
Ascent: 4,506ft
Challenge Rating: 4/5

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE DAY

The Scottish border photo opp
The Lowther Hills
Sweeping views of the Lowlands of Scotland



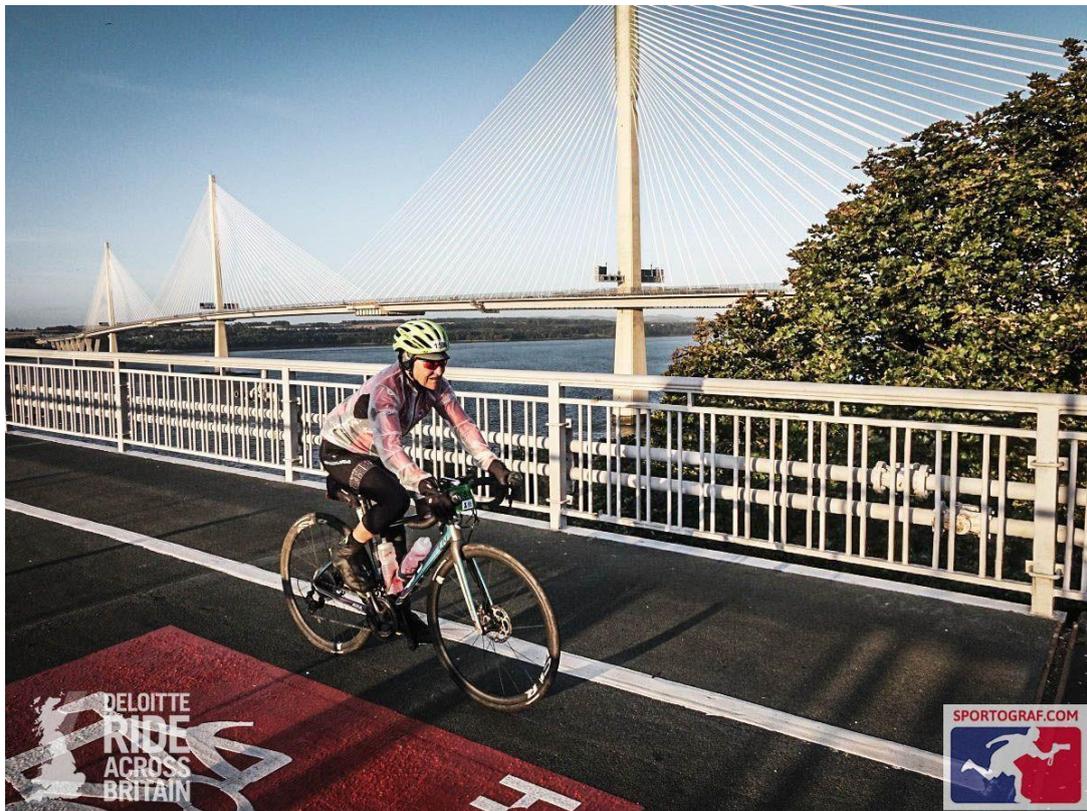
Carolyn Penney
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Stage 7

Day 7 was the toughest – mainly due to the inclement weather. We crossed the iconic Forth River Bridge and struggled up the Grampian Mountains through the Cairngorms National Park, conquering the mighty Glenshee – the biggest climb I have ever done on a bike. As the route winds into Strathdon, there are views of the historic Braemar Castle. It was very very cold at the top, and the welcome support staff handed out space blankets to keep us warm when descending.

KEY STATS Distance: 111.6 miles Ascent: 7,035ft Challenge Rating: 5/5	HIGHLIGHTS OF THE DAY The Grampian Mountains and The Cairngorms National Park The world famous Glenshee Riding alongside the River Dee Braemar Castle
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Stage 8

I very nearly took a turn in the Broom Wagon today. Many did to avoid the horrifying 40 mph cross winds. I was exhausted. One of my dearest friends, Mairi, surprised me at the first pit stop on Grantown on Spey and my family waved and cheered on the side of the road near Cawdor Castle. This spurred me on. I cycled up the infamous Lecht Hill (though my Garmin thought I had stopped at various points due to the super slow speed) but I made it without walking. Many walked (or gave up). We finished with another very cold descent to the finish at the Kyle of Sutherland. Thank goodness for the space blanket covering my front!

KEY STATS Distance: 118.8 miles Ascent: 6,515ft Challenge Rating: 5/5	HIGHLIGHTS OF THE DAY Lecht Road Tomintoul village- Whisky area Dulsie Bridge
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Stage 9

The long-awaited final day began with an undulating route in some of the remotest and most spectacular parts of Scotland. Struggling into the 40 + mph head wind, this section was very slow and difficult. On a good day, it would have been a gentle and pleasurable ride. The days started with a climb up to the two highest points of the stage – Cnoc Staign and Strath Vagastie – before winding through the Strathnaver Valley and on towards the rugged North Atlantic Coast. Once we turned East along the coast, the wind was behind us so the last section to the finishing line at John O'Groats proved slightly easier! Being greeted by my family, cheers and a glass of champagne made everything worthwhile!

Even better, I exceeded my fund raising target of £5000 for the Alzheimer's Society, so felt my efforts were put to good use!

KEY STATS

Distance: 104.1 miles
Ascent: 4,541ft
Challenge Rating: 4/5

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE DAY

The remote splendour of the Strathnaver Valley
The rugged North Atlantic Coast
Views of the Orkneys

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The Camping

Arguably, this was the most challenging part of the 9 day trip. Arriving at the camp site, drenched through and tired from 100+ miles of cycling, you park your (soaking wet, muddy) bike. Some enthusiasts cleaned their bikes for the next day. I would have like a cleaning service!

You march to collect your tent number, squelch through the muddy field to find your tent, collecting your bag on the way. You fall in a heap and attempt to find some dry clothes and washing stuff, and then march forward to join the queue to the shower. The trick is to remember several plastic bags. Once in the shower, you peel off your soaking bike clothes (fill the plastic bags with clothes - some for the drying room and others for washing), take a hot shower and then stagger back to your tent (ideally via the drying tent to deposit some of the load) to sort your clothes for tomorrow, lay out your mat and sleeping bag for the night. Then it was off to get some welcome hot food and drink.



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The Drying Room

The drying room was a large marquee with hangers and pegs. It smelt of sweaty clothes and dirty shoes and was fed by an industrial blower heater. Care needed to be taken not to put shoes too near to the blower as some actually melted!

The Food

The food was nothing short of amazing. Plentiful, nutritious, varied and the high point of the day. The choices catered for everyone, including vegetarian and special diets. Positively top notch. The puddings were even better!

Evening Briefings

At 8pm every evening, we had our “pep” talks, telling us about the route and weather for the following day and that there was “*more in us*”. We could do it etc etc! This was Type 2 Fun; where Type 1 Fun is just having a good knees up, Type 2 Fun requires huge amount of effort and isn't really any fun at all until it is over!

The Weather

Whilst we did have some good days, the weather proved a significant challenge with several rainy days, the tail end of Hurricane Dorian and 40 mph cross winds in Scotland making it hard to cycle in a straight line or get above 8 mph. It was cold too – but the tip given was to shove a space blanket over your chest underneath your cycling jersey and this proved a life saver when whizzing down from Glenshee at speeds of around 40 mph.

The Broom Wagon

The Broom Wagon was a 50 seater luxury coach (or maybe 2) with a vast trailer for 50 bikes. No-one ever told you (nor could you seem to find out) how many people actually went in the Broom Wagon. Suffice to say, rumours were that on Day 7 Peter Davies had never been so busy in 8 years, and that even if you chose to stop, there was no more space. I kept well away.

Fitness & Training

My training with Tim from Catenary Coaching served me well. I had no muscle pains and no knee pains and (as I had followed the plan fairly thoroughly) no saddle sores. Many people had to visit the Medical Team to get their knees/calves taped, for pain killers and take daily massages to help their progress.

For me the biggest challenge was pure fatigue – ie, not getting enough sleep at night before the 5 am wake up song (Rock you baby, 500 miles, I can ride my bicycle or the final countdown).

The Mental Side

Getting to the end was all about the mental side. Everyone probably had times when they wondered why they were doing this. I did – but I had huge support from family and friends and raised a significant amount for the Alzheimer's Society. I HAD TO DO IT!

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The End



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Appendix – Map Charts

7 September 2019

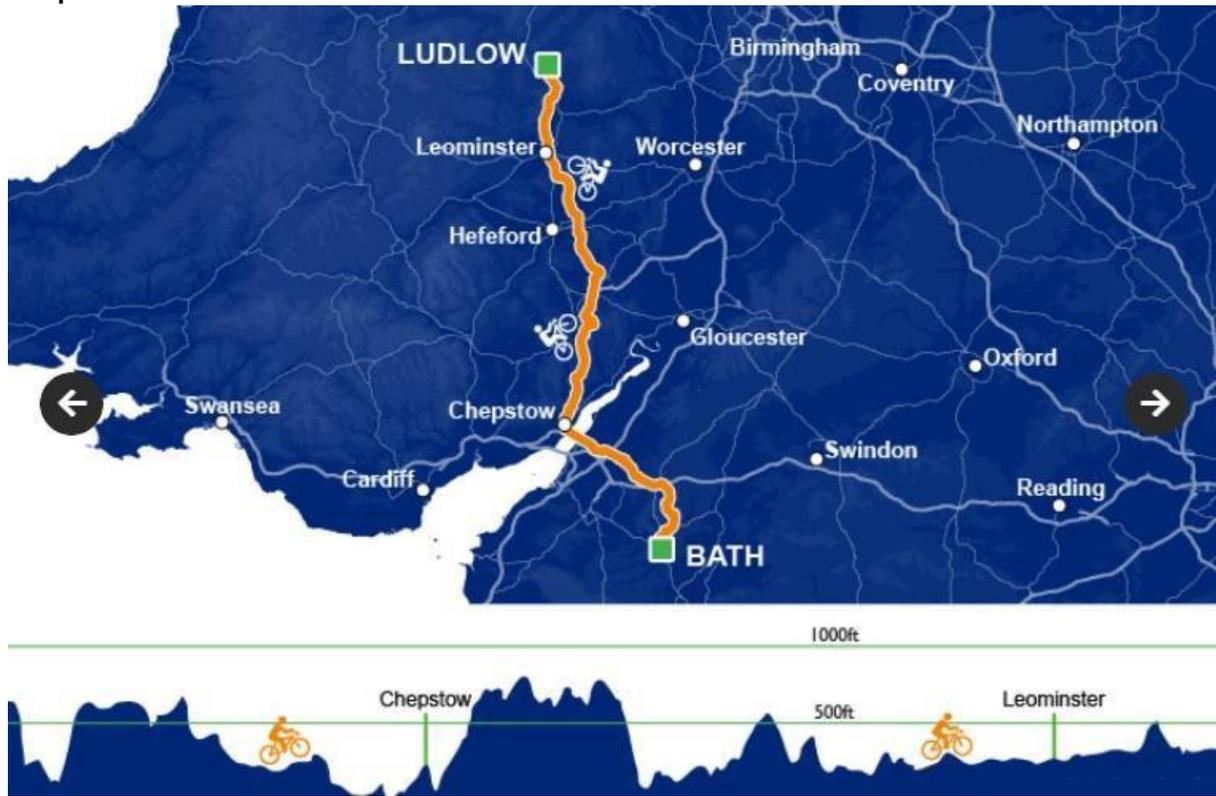


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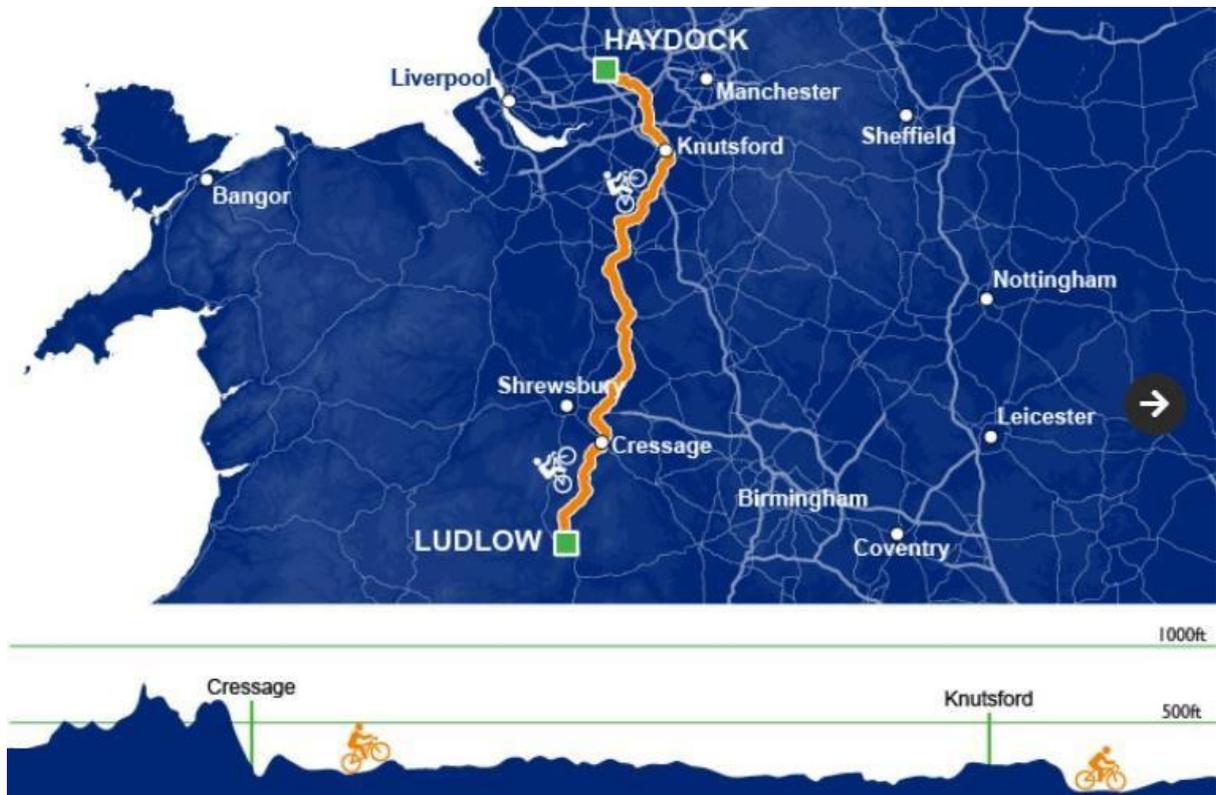


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9 September 2019



10 September 2019



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11 September 2019

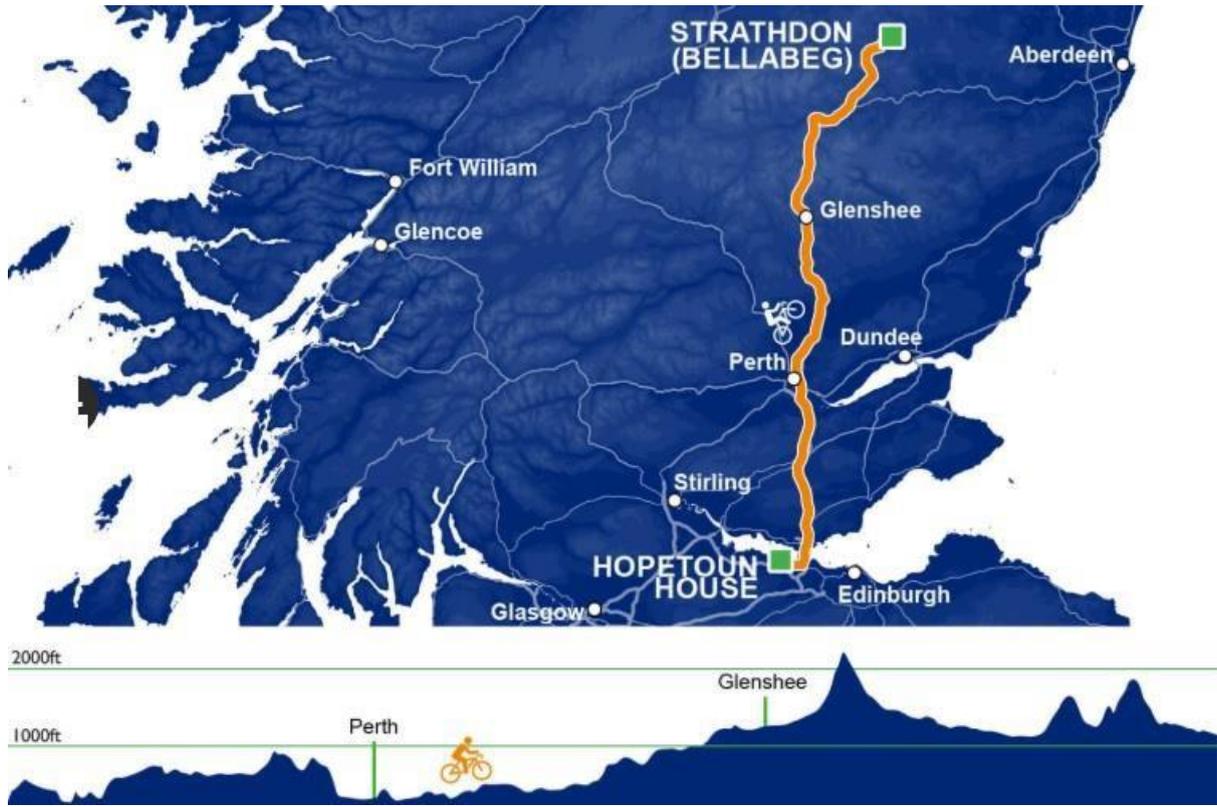


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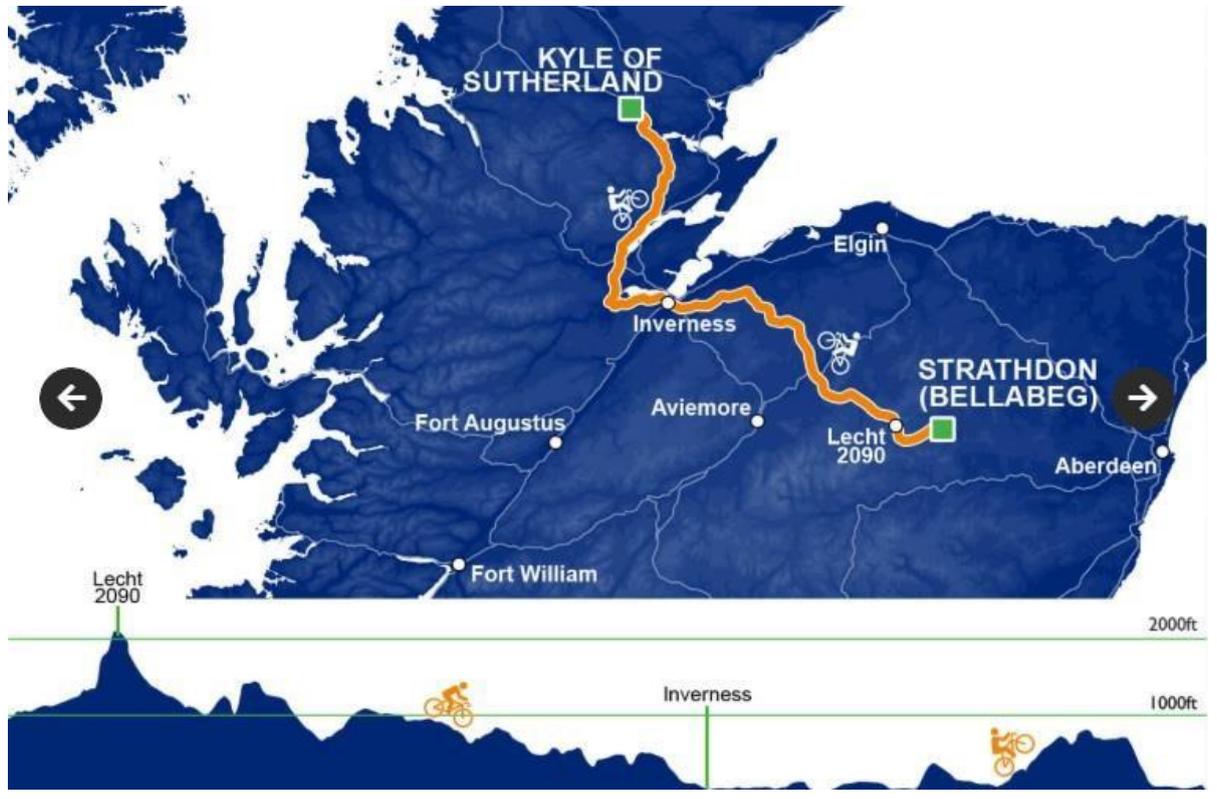


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13 September 2019



14 September 2019



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